

DISCOURSE AND THIRD SPACE IN FRANK MCCOURT'S NOVEL *TEACHER MAN* AND TOM SCHULMAN'S PLAY *DEAD POETS SOCIETY*; A REFLECTIVE PRACTICE FOR TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Pahl and Rowsell (2005) elucidate that Discourse is ways of dressing, speaking and acting which delineates person's identities in literacy practices, while a third space is as a meeting space between home space and school space, blend space and mix space which lets teachers think of how their students' meaning-making happen-between school and home. This paper investigates how these theories are fruitfully presented in the character of Mr. McCourt's Teacher Man and Mr. Keating's Dead Poets Society. Subsequently, it is interconnected with an educational theory which is taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing. A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, as recommended by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). The result shows that the Metacognitive Knowledge domain prominently becomes the intersection as it is emphasizing on the student's awareness of one's own cognition and cognitive processes, particularly contextualizing students' prior knowledge and general knowledge. Mr. McCourt and Mr. Keating have succeeded in shifting scary and strict classroom situation generated by most teachers to become so challenging and much more interesting by utilizing multimodal styles and skills, and by piloting third space activity. Henceforth, the writer recommends teachers to maximize their potential fictional characters to accommodate their students' preferences or styles in learning. In addition, designing teaching and learning processes in-between home and school is necessary in order to contextual and perceive-real life experiences.

Keywords: *Discourse, Third space, novel, teacher, reflection*

I. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning, literacy was simply determined as a set of reading and writing skills. Contemporary, it has been broaden not only as a set of skills but also as a social practice, which means engaging people's activities in mundane life, at work or at school to generate skills' productions. This type of literacy is named New Literacy Studies (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Luke, 2005). In his writing, Luke states that three decades ago New Literacy Studies was inspired by Paulo Freire's 'practice of freedom', and New London

Group's 'critical and transformed practice', and was dedicated as social transformation through a cultural and political response. Today, this literacy has an amount of theoretical, practical and pedagogical research in diverse fields; literature, education, linguistics, ethnography, and so forth. Several key concepts of this literacy theory are applied to strengthen research or experiment. Among them are discourse and Discourse (Gee, 1999) and third space (Moje et al., 2004; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Wilson, 2000).

In this present study, these theories will be employed to reveal the values in correlating education system and educators' ways in teaching and learning process which appear in the main characters in Frank McCourt's novel *Teacher Man* and Tom Schulman's play *Dead Poets Society*. These literary works are recognized as one of the best and have inspired teachers wide world; nonetheless, few scholars have analyzed them through the eye of New Literacy Studies.

Accordingly, the writer argues that the two theories; Discourse (Gee, 1999) and third space (Moje et al., 2004; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Wilson, 2000), will present the ways McCourt's and Keating's, as extraordinary teachers in the stories, maximize all their (teachers and students) potential Discourse and third spaces in order to achieve better understanding of the school curricula and the real life and its vicarious experiences.

Discourse and Third Space

James Paul Gee is the person who has coined a theory of language which viewed language as socially situated. Paying attention on a person's language-in-use, it is named **discourse**, while being concerned with the way a person speaks about language and other matter (e.g. style of clothing, gestures, bodily movements, and so forth), it is called **Discourse** (Gee, 1999; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). Pahl and Rowsell (2005) assert that Discourses (ways of dressing, speaking and acting) delineate person identities in literacy practices. Thus, understanding literacy as socially situated through Gee's Discourse exposes a person's identities and at the same time stimulates others to use Discourse to shape their identities. In these novel and film, the researcher explores the use of Discourses which appear within the characters.

The last term is the idea of third space as promoted by Wilson (2000), then sustained by Moje's third space (Moje et al., 2004), and revisited by Pahl and Rowsell (2005). Pahl and Rowsell (2005) consider a third space as gathering spaces between home space and school space, blend and mix space, in which lets teachers think how their students' meaning-making happen between school and home. They argue that this idea will subconsciously determine what students' needs based on what they want know and have known. For example: a classroom offers students a third space by using the noticeboard where students' words or texts are freely are written with their artifacts, such as: photographs or posters which they bring from home or their communities. This activity means students' identities are respected and appreciated, and consequently, builds a link to the students' Discourse, funds of knowledge, cultural capital in order to rise and transform their identities. Therefore, writing and literacy generate people's cultural identity through their social and cultural interactions. As the previous terms will be used as the literary critics in Frank McCourt's novel *Teacher Man* and Tom Schulman's play *Dead Poets Society*, the latest term is also employed by the researcher to look for the third space that emerge within both literary works.

II. DISCUSSION

Discourse in Frank McCourt's Novel *Teacher Man* (Mccourt, 2005)

On the first day as a new teacher at McKee Vocational and Technical High School in the Borough of Staten Island, New York City, Mr. McCourt, as the main character in this novel has encountered uncommon Discourse. In unexpected classroom condition, he forces himself to eat Petey's sandwich and hit the basket in order to control the 'wild' students. Yet, McCourt's unplanned movements or responses are also surprising his students and the principle as well. Unluckily, the principle then gives him a warning due to eating his student's sandwich in the classroom. On the contrary, his students are happy with this situation. Afterward, these weird and uncommon Discourses shape Mr. McCourt's identities in his classroom as an English teacher. It is shown in the pages below.

"The problem of sandwich started when a boy named by Petey called out, Anyone wan' a baloney sandwich? ...
Petey threw his brown-paper sandwich bag at the critic, Andy, and the class cheered. Fight, fight, they said. ...
I came from behind my desk and made the first sound of my teaching career: Hey. ... and all I could think of was Hey.
I said it again. Hey.
They ignored me. ...
Should I say, Hey, Petey, get up here and pick up the sandwich, or else? Should I pick it up myself and throw it into the wastepaper basket to show my contempt ...? ...
I ate the sandwich.
It was my first act of classroom management. My mouth, clogged with sandwich, attracted the attention of the class.
...
So, this is teaching? Yeah, wow. I felt like a champion.

(McCourt, 2005, pp. 15-17)

From the excerpt above, it can be inferred that by providing a surprising response to his special students, Mr. McCourt feels like a real teacher who can handle a ruthless situation on in his first day of teaching. Even he receives a warning from the school principle; his unpredictable classroom management generates him to be a better teacher and loved by his students. His ways of teaching then developed uniquely in the next day.

Instead of teaching, I told stories. Anything to keep them quiet and in their seats. They thought I was teaching. I thought I was teaching. I was learning. And you called yourself a teacher?

I didn't call myself anything. I was more than a teacher. And less. In the high school classroom you are a drill sergeant, a rabbi, a shoulder to cry on, a disciplinarian, a singer, a low-level scholar, a clerk, a referee, a clown, a counselor, ... a bookkeeper, a critic, a psychologist, the last straw.

(McCourt, 2005, p. 19)

The above paragraphs show that McCourt applies various ways in teaching, such as: telling stories instead of explaining grammar or writing materials conventionally. Luckily, his students regard this teaching style as teaching processes. Yet, McCourt considers his conditions more than just as a teacher. Simply, he says that it looks like a drill sergeant, a rabbi, a shoulder to cry on, a disciplinarian, a singer, and a low-level scholar.

Discourse in Tom Schulman's Play *Dead Poets Society* (Script, 2007)

Mr. Keating as the main character in this play also has an excellent Discourse (Gee, 1999; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). As a teacher, his language-in-use in giving classroom instructions or explaining the materials inside and outside classroom activities, and his stuffs (e.g. style of clothing, gestures, and bodily movements, so forth), enchant his students and make them so curious as well. He often speaks both so slowly and loudly, gets so close to the students and stares at them, stroll along the aisles, stride in front of the class and stand up on his desk. He reads certain poems and then, instead of calling him Mr. Keating, he permits them to call him with the title of the poem, "Oh Captain, My Captain". These odd and unusual Discourses are exactly representing his strong and 'colorful' identities in his literacy practices in his classroom as an English teacher, as shown in the excerpts below.

INT. ENGLISH CLASSROOM - DAY

KEATING
(to the blushing boy)
Don't be embarrassed.
(He moves off, then stops in front of Charlie Dalton.)

KEATING
(as if discovering something known only to himself)
Uh-huh.
(he moves to Todd Anderson)
Uh-huh.
(he moves to Neil Perry)
Ha!
(Keating slaps his free hand with the yardstick, then strides to the front of the room.)

KEATING
Nimble young minds!
(He steps up onto the desk, turns and faces the class.)

KEATING
(energetically)
Oh Captain, My Captain. Who knows where that's from?
(No one raises a hand.)

KEATING
It was written by a poet named Walt Whitman about Mr. Abraham Lincoln.

KEATING
In this class you may refer to me as either Mr. Keating, or Oh Captain, My Captain.
(Keating steps down and starts, strolling the aisles.)
(Script, 2007, pp. 17-18)

Another day, Mr. Keating takes his students to another room, particularly an honor room of the school. An honor room means a room which has a function to display students' awards. For sure, the students feel and perceive different learning circumstance, new 'scenery', and elicit their learning curiosity. By conducting teaching and learning process in this room, Mr. Keating consciously wants to teach his students the deep philosophy of being a student and a young man by connecting the poem (lesson material) – particularly on words of "Carpe Diem"- and the ancient students' achievements with their trophies. This situation is stated below.

KEATING

Mister...

(Keating looks at his roll)

Pitts. An unfortunate name. Stand up, Mister Pitts.

(Pitts stands.)

KEATING

Open your text, Pitts, to page forty and read for us the first stanza of the poem.

(Pitts looks through his book. He finds the poem.)

PITTS

"To The Virgins to Make Much of Time?"

KEATING

That's the one.

(Giggles in the class. Pitts reads.)

PITTS

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may Old time is still a flying. And this same flower that smiles today Tomorrow will be dying."

KEATING

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may. The Latin term for that sentiment is "Carpe Diem."

Anyone know what that means?

MEEKS

Carpe Diem... seize the day.

KEATING

Very good, Mr....?

MEEKS

Meeks.

KEATING

Seize the day while you're young, see that you make use of your time. Why does the poet write these lines?

A STUDENT
Because he's in a hurry?

KEATING
Because we're food for worms, lads! Because we're only going to experience a limited number of springs, summers, and falls. One day, hard as it is to believe, each and every one of us is going to stop breathing, turn cold, and die! Stand up and peruse the faces of the boys who attended this school sixty or seventy years ago. Don't be timid, go look at them.
(The boys get up. Todd, Neil, Knox, Meeks, etc. go over to the class pictures that line the honor room walls. ANGLES ON VARIOUS PICTURES ON THE WALLS. Faces of young men stare at us from out of the past.)
(Script, 2007, pp. 18-19)

Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), in their phenomenal book *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*, propose four domains of cognitive knowledge; Factual, Conceptual, Procedural, and Metacognitive Knowledge. The last domain is prominent and is the newest domain which refers to the awareness of one's own cognition and particular cognitive processes. Kurnia (2016) asserts that this awareness is named as strategic or reflective knowledge. Mr. Keating's and Mr. McCourt's styles of teaching probably touch their students' cognition awareness.

Absolutely, they have succeeded in shifting 'frightening' and strict classroom situations created by most teachers to become so challenging and much more interesting. Further, they kindly use multimodal styles and skills in language-in-use and in materials (e.g. style of clothing, gestures, and bodily movements, so forth), to encourage smooth transfer of new knowledge. Again, the standpoint which may be considered the most important is the incredible ways they encourage their students' awareness in learning, such as teaching so slowly and speaking loudly, gets so close to the students and stare at them, strolls along the aisles, strides in front of the class and stands up onto their desks, permits students to call them with the title of the poem, "Oh Captain, My Captain", telling stories, eating the sandwich, and so forth, all of them are the essences of Discourse.

Third Space in Frank McCourt's Novel *Teacher Man* (Mccourt, 2005)

In 1974, in the third year of teaching at Stuyvesant High School, McCourt was invited to be a new Creative Writing instructor. Luckily, his new chairman, Roger Goodman, gives him freedom to apply his unique ideas and his weird ways of teaching in directing his classroom and his students, and so forth. Accordingly, one day he asks his students to study vocabulary in the city park. This program, then, is stated in the paragraph below.

Next day people walking in the park stopped to see what we were doing. ...
A police car cruised by. The cops wanted to know what was going on. You're not supposed to have fairs in the park without city permission. I explained this was a lesson in vocabulary and look at what my students were learning. ...
Before they (visitors) drove away, they asked how often we planned to have these vocabulary lessons.

(Mccourt, 2005, p. 205)

The third space theory (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005) proposes teachers think how their students' meaning-making-happened between school and home, and subconsciously determine "students' language needs based on what they know and what they have experienced," (p. 105). The above excerpt reveals Mr. McCourt's strategy to bring his students outside the classroom and the school, to learn vocabulary through food exhibition in the city park, to express their desire, their characteristics and their own life, particularly related with their passions in learning English. It supports the theory of Metacognitive Knowledge by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), whereby the domain attentively stresses the awareness of one's own cognition and particular cognitive processes, particularly contextualizing students' knowledge and general knowledge. Hence, a park in this novel becomes a place that yields students' creativity and identity primarily based on their own experiences and their language or learning needs.

Third Space in Tom Schulman's Film *Dead Poets Society*

Third space (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005) should be designed and provided by a teacher inside or outside the classroom or school, as has been done by Mr. Keating in his lovely classroom. By proposing this space, it makes teachers

think how their students' meaning-making happens between school and home, and subconsciously determines students' language needs based on their own life experiences. This excerpt shows the readers that Mr. Keating's students seek for the cave –as their third space- in order to express their desire, their characteristics and their own life, particularly related with their passions in learning poetry, music, art, and so forth.

EXT. THE WELTON WOODS AND STREAM - NIGHT

The boys make their way through the eerie forest searching for the cave. They reach the bank of the stream and begin looking for an appropriate spot amongst the tree roots and erosion. Charlie suddenly looms out of the cave entrance.

CHARLIE

Yaa, I'm a dead poet!

MEEKS

(frightened)

Ahh!

(then recovering)

Eat it, Dalton!

CHARLIE

This is it.

INT. THE CAVE - A BIT LATER

A newly lit fire comes to life... The boys huddle around the flames.

NEIL

I hereby reconvene the Welton Chapter of the Dead Poets Society. These meetings will be conducted by myself and by the rest of the new initiates now present. Todd Anderson, because he prefers not to read, will keep minutes of the meetings. Todd is unhappy with this role but he tries not to show it.

NEIL

I will now read the traditional opening message from society member Henry David Thoreau. Neil opens Keating's copy of Thoreau's *Walden*, and reads.

NEIL

"I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately."

(skips thru the text)

"I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life!"

CHARLIE

All right. I'll second that.

NEIL

"To put the rout all that was not life.

(skips thru the text)

And not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

(Pledge Overstreet.)

(Script, 2007, pp. 37-38)

Again, teachers are recommended to serve third spaces in order to elicit students' meaning-making and to determine students' language needs based on their live experiences. Neil and friends finally find a cave to express their desire, their characteristics and their own life, particularly related with their passions in learning poetry, music, art, and many other subjects. It asserts the theory of Metacognitive Knowledge by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). This domain highly emphasizes the awareness of one's own cognition and particular cognitive processes, particularly to include their own contextual and conditional knowledge and knowledge of self. Furthermore, a cave in this play exactly becomes a place that yields students' creativity and identity primarily based on their own experiences and their language or learning necessities.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Discourse in Frank McCourt's Novel *Teacher Man* and in Tom Schulman's Film *Dead Poets Society*

Similarities

Both characters; Mr. McCourt's in *Teacher Man* and Mr. Keating in *Dead Poets Society*, have the same notions of Discourse. They show unique identities as language teachers in amazing ways, uncommon, weird, and unusual. In the teaching and learning process, they apply particular teaching strategies based on their own potential characteristics; not only merely reading and speaking all time in front the students, but also completing them with excellent gestures or body movements; for example: standing up on the desk, playing the tones of his voices; for example: telling stories and spending much time discussing about it, and so forth. Consequently, what they have done are against the existing rules, norms, and laws at the school, and ultimately, the principles fire them from the schools. Mr. McCourt was fired from McKee Vocational and Technical High School in the Borough of Staten Island, New York City, while Mr. Keating was fired from International Welton Academy.

Differences

Mr. McCourt's weird Discourse in *Teacher Man* is shaped unconsciously by his first teaching career at McKee Vocational and Technical High School in

the Borough of Staten Island, New York City. In the morning at his classroom, when his students do not care about him as a new teacher and throwing sandwich to show their naughtiness, he finally decides to take the sandwich from the floor and eats the baloney sandwich in order to catch the students' attention, even though his students laugh at his silly action. His action is unplanned.

Mr. Keating's unique Discourse in *Dead Poets Society* is constructed naturally since the first day on his teaching career at International Welton Academy. Consciously, he enters the classroom by staring at all students one by one without saying many words and strolling the aisles and standing up on his desk. His Discourses definitely make all his students keep on paying attention, having high concentration, as well as curiosity.

Third Space in Frank McCourt's Novel *Teacher Man* and in Tom Schulman's Film *Dead Poets Society*

Similarities

Similar to Discourse matter, the usage of third space is also well organized in both novels. Mr. McCourt in *Teacher Man* uses a city park, instead of daily classroom, as teaching and learning place in order to teach new vocabulary to encourage serving food from their own countries. While Mr. Keating in *Dead Poets Society*, encourages and motivates his students to seize the day through making secret community and looking for a secret place; such as a cave, in order to explore all their desires, skills, abilities, preferences, identities, and freedom.

Differences

In *Teacher Man*, the idea to take a city park as the third space in learning new vocabulary is proposed and constructed by the teacher, Mr. McCourt. He is fully taking the responsibility of this teaching and learning activity through food exhibition. The students are happily explaining and having dialogues about the food, the ingredients, and the taste which they made based on their own countries' food to the visitors. Of course, there are several odd vocabularies or terms that can be obtained from this activity. It is

little bit different in *Dead Poets Society*, Mr. Keating does not take the credit for his students' notion to reborn the poets' community at the cave, miles from their Academy. At the cave, Neil and friends proclaim the community and explore their activities there; expressing their desires, abilities, skills, and competences, without it being known by the principle of International Welton Academy, or even by their beloved teacher, Mr. Keating.

III. CONCLUSION

As has been explained by Pahl and Rowsell (2005) that Discourse is ways of dressing, speaking and acting which delineate a person's identities in literacy practices. They also coin the term third space as a meeting space between home and school spaces, blend and mix spaces, that let teachers think of how their students' meaning-making happened between school and home. These theories are fruitfully presented in the characters of Mr. McCourt's *Teacher Man* and Mr. Keating's *Dead Poets Society*.

In connecting with educational theory, the writer applies The revised Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, as proposed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). Among the four domains of cognitive knowledge; Factual, Conceptual, Procedural, and Metacognitive Knowledge; the last domain is prominently become the intersection as it is emphasizes the student's awareness of one's own cognition and particular cognitive processes, particularly contextualizing students' knowledge and general knowledge. Undeniably, Mr. McCourt and Mr. Keating have succeeded in practicing metacognitive knowledge; such as by shifting strict classroom situation made by most teachers become so challenging and much interesting by using multimodal styles and skills in language-in-use and in performances (e.g. style of clothing, gestures, and bodily movements, so forth) and continuously, conducting third space activity.

Accordingly, the writer recommends teachers to maximize their own potential characters to accommodate their students' preferences or styles in achieving learning targets. One of the potential characters is recognizing self-knowledge and self-awareness of his/her own potential-characters, and lastly it will raise learning awareness. Further, designing teaching and learning

process in-between home and school literacy domain is an indispensable thing to be done, in order to contextualize and perceive real life experiences.

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